

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00639 140902Z

15
ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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R 140825Z AUG 76
FM AMCONSUL ASMARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4091
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON
COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN
COMIDEASTFOR
NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA
NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI
CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0639

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS ET
SUBJECT: PEACE DELEGATION RETURNS FROM ASSAB

REF: ASMARA 0638 (DTG 131345Z AUG 76)

1. ON AUGUST 11, THE 15-MEMBER DELEGATION OF THE ERITREAN ELDERS COMMITTEE RETURNED TO ASMARA FROM ASSAB FOLLOWING LARGELY FRUITLESS THIRD ROUND TALKS WITH ERITREAN INSURGENTS. THE DELEGATION, WHICH LEFT ASMARA ON JULY 31, MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ELF RATHER THAN WITH THE AFAR LIBERATION FRONT OR DISSIDENT DANAKILS AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED. THE MEETING WAS THE RESULT OF AN EXCHANGE OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE ELDERS COMMITTEE AND A LOCAL UNIT OF THE ELF.

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PAGE 02 ASMARA 00639 140902Z

2. THE TALKS WERE INITIALLY DELAYED BECAUSE OF CONFUSION IN

ARRANGEMENTS TO MEET WITH ELF CONTACTS, AND BECAUSE OF CONTINUING TENSIONS IN ASSAB IN THE WAKE OF THE ABORTIVE MUTINY OF THE 26TH BATTALION. THE ELDERS FINALLY WERE TAKEN BY BOAT TO AN AGREED LOCALE ALONG THE RED SEA COAST NORTH OF ASSAB, THOUGHT TO BE IN THE VICINITY OF BEILUL. IN CONTRAST TO THEIR RECEPTION FROM THE ELF REPOS WITH WHOM THEY MET IN THE KEREN AREA IN JUNE, THIS GROUP OF ELF RECEIVED THE DELEGATION VERY WARMLY AND HOSPITABLY.

3. THE ELF COMMENDED THE ELDERS ON THEIR WILLINGNESS TO TRAVEL THROUGHOUT ERITREA IN SEARCH OF A NEGOTIATED PEACE, BUT THEN IMMEDIATELY QUASHED ALL HOPES OF SUBSTANTIVE TALKS BY NOTING THAT ANY AGREEMENT WITH THE ELF WOULD HAVE TO BE NEGOTIATED DIRECTLY WITH A NINE-MAN COMMITTEE WHICH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED SPECIFICALLY FOR THIS PURPOSE. WHILE OFFERING THEIR APPRECIATION FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS ISSUES WITH THE ELDERS, THE ELF REPS SAID ANY VIEWS THEY MIGHT HAVE WOULD HAVE TO BE FORWARDED TO THE ELF NINE-MAN COMMITTEE. ONE APPROACH THE ELF REPS REJECTED OUT-OF-HAND WAS DISCUSSING PEACE ON THE BASIS OF THE EPMG'S NINE-POINT PROPOSAL. THE REBELS CLAIMED THIS PROPOSAL OFFERS THEM NOTHING SUBSTANTIVE AND THEIR ONLY RESPONSE IS TO DEMAND TOTAL INDEPENDENCE AS A PRECONDITION.

4. COMMENT: THE IMPLICATION AT THE CLOSE OF THIS MEETING WAS THAT THE NEXT PHASE OF THE ELDERS' PEACE EFFORTS WILL BE TO CONTACT THE ELF'S NINE-MAN COMMITTEE, ALTHOUGH NO TIMEFRAME HAS BEEN FIXED. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE EPMG'S WILLINGNESS TO PERMIT THE ELDERS TO PURSUE THEIR THUS FAR FUTILE EFFORTS AT PEACE IS AN ELEMENT IN THEIR PLAN TO SHOW WILLINGNESS TO SEEK PEACE BY WHATEVER PATH. THIS PLAN APPARENTLY ALSO INVOLVES THE "REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT" PROGRAM OF MAJOR BERHANU, AND SUCH INITIATIVES AS THAT OF LCOL ASRAT DESTA. THE PREVAILING THOUGHT APPEARS THAT THE MORE EFFORTS LAUNCHED, THE GREATER THE CHANCE FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. WAUCHOPE

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